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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001384

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS
NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: Maldivian presidential selection process set to kick off, with President expected to win easily

Refs: Colombo 1266, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Charge d'Affaires.
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: The Maldivian presidential selection process is set to kick off in September, with the Majlis (parliament) selecting a candidate who will stand in a referendum in October. President Gayoom is widely expected to win with ease. Gayoom seems a popular ruler, though the selection system has come under some criticism. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (U) UPCOMING PRESIDENTIAL "ELECTION": The Maldivian presidential selection process is set to kick off. The Maldivian government has not yet settled on a final schedule of events, but the Majlis seems slated to select a candidate in September who will then stand in a national referendum in October. The presidential inauguration is tentatively scheduled to take place in November.

¶13. (U) MORE ON THE PROCESS: Under the country's presidential selection process (which the Maldivians call an "election"), any citizen who meets the eligibility requirements (Sunni Muslim, requisite age 35 or older, male, etc.) set out in the 1968 constitution, can run for president by submitting his name as a candidate to the unicameral 48-member Majlis. In a secret ballot, the Majlis, which is composed of elected

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and appointed members (there are no political parties), then selects a single candidate. This candidate is then approved (or not) in a "yes or no" national referendum, with a majority "yes" vote needed for approval. The president serves a five year term.

¶14. (C) GAYOON WIDELY EXPECTED TO WIN: President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who has been in power since 1978, is widely expected to run and win his sixth term. When queried during a recent Embassy trip to Male, interlocutors said they expected that Gayoom would win without much if any problem. Some observers have told embiffs, however, that Gayoom might face an opponent or two in the Majlis vote that kicks off the process. None of the possible opponents is considered well-known, or to be much of a threat to Gayoom, who is believed to maintain strong support among the various atoll-based factions that rub shoulders in the Majlis. Once Gayoom gets past the Majlis, he seems set to easily win the "yes/no" referendum. In past referendums, Gayoom has garnered well over 95 percent "yes" votes.

¶15. (C) COMMENT: With the wind of solid economic indices behind his back (see Reftels), Gayoom and his ruling circle seem to be relatively popular (there are no polls, so this perception is anecdotal). The Maldives, however, has come under some criticism for its only marginally democratic presidential selection process, which has chronically produced non-competitive races in the past. In recent years, given very tentative stirrings among the younger generation for change (50 percent of the population is under 20 years of age), this system might well have to be adjusted and opened up. At this point, however, Gayoom's path to a sixth term seems to be clear. END COMMENT.

¶16. (U) Minimize considered.

ENTWISTLE